



U.S. Coast Guard History Program

Vigilant, 1812

Newport, Rhode Island
Master John Cahoone

On the alert: watchful.

Builder: Benjamin Marble, Newport, Rhode Island

Rig:

Length: 60'

Beam: 19'

Draft: 10'

Displacement: 65 tons

Cost: \$8,500.00

Commissioned: 1812

Disposition: Place out of service on 13 May 1842 and sold.

Compliment: 17

Armament: 1842

Cutter History:

Cutter: On April 13, 1812, shipbuilder Benjamin Marble of Newport signed a contract to build, equip, furnish and finish the revenue cutter *Vigilant*. On August 21, 1812, the Newport customs collector paid Marble \$8,500.00 for completing the new cutter. The cutter measured sixty feet in length; had a nearly nineteen-foot beam; and drew ten feet. It displaced sixty-five tons; had a coppered bottom; and carried seventeen crewmembers. This cutter was the third named "Vigilant" and it remained in service until May 13, 1842, when it was decommissioned and sold.

Master: On January 25, 1812, John Cahoone received a commission as master in the State of Rhode Island. Cahoone assumed command of *Vigilant* and remained in command of it until February 25, 1830. He died on October 1, 1836,

after a prolonged leave of absence due to serious injury. During the War of 1812, Cahoone's officers included William Shearman, first mate; and Thomas Hudson, second mate.

War of 1812 Events and Operations:

June 18, 1812. President James Madison signs a declaration of war and the War of 1812 officially begins. The congressional authorization states "*that the President of the United States is hereby authorized to use the whole land and naval force of the United States . . . against the vessels, goods, and effects of the government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and the subjects thereof.*"

June 18, 1812. Treasury Secretary Albert Gallatin sends a circular to all customs collectors, writing only the sentence: "*Sir, I hasten to inform you that War was this day declared against Great Britain*". In a separate circular, Gallatin orders the news dispatched to U.S. naval vessels by revenue cutters stationed at Savannah; Norfolk; Charleston; New York; Portsmouth, New Hampshire; Wilmington, North Carolina; and Wilmington, Delaware.

December 28, 1812. In response to a letter from the Boston Customs Collector, Treasury Secretary Albert Gallatin writes, "*A Revenue Cutter cannot be expressly fitted and employed for the purpose of cruising against an enemy except under the 98th Section of the collection law in which case the Cutter must be placed under the direction of the Secretary of the Navy.*"

October 4, 1813. *Vigilant* (John Cahoone) captures British privateer *Dart*. *Vigilant* sailed out of Newport, Rhode Island, pursued the armed privateer and caught it. *Vigilant* fired a few guns at the privateer, and then Master John Cahoone ordered his cutter alongside *Dart*. Cahoone sent on board *Dart* an armed boarding party, which chased the privateer's crew below deck and captured the ship. *Dart* was armed with one twelve-pound, two nine-pound, and two six-pound cannon, and four swivel guns. According to the *Columbian Patriot* (October 20): "*Captain Cahoone, with the volunteers under his command, deserve the highest credit for the spirit and promptitude with which this affair was conducted; and it is of the utmost importance, as it is probable she [Dart] would, but for this, have been almost a constant visitor during the ensuing season, when the mischief she would have done is incalculable.*" This was the last successful use of boarding by a revenue cutter in the Age of Sail.

October 26, 1813. *Vigilant* captures a British prize schooner carrying a cargo of wood forced into Newport Harbor due to damaged sails and rigging. The British prize crew escaped in the ship's boat but later surrendered to authorities in Saybrook, Connecticut.

January 20, 1814. John Cahoone petitions Congress for compensation for capture of the British privateer *Dart*.

June 4, 1814. *Vigilant* tows into Newport, Rhode Island, the fire-damaged brig *Little Francis*, bound from St. Barts with molasses and sugar.

August 8, 1814. Peace negotiations between the United States and Great Britain begin in Ghent, Belgium.

December 24, 1814. Peace treaty (Treaty of Ghent) signed between representatives of the United States and Great Britain at a ceremony in Ghent, Belgium.

January 4, 1815. In response to the destructive effects of the war on commerce, New England delegates to the Hartford Convention claim that “*Commerce, the vital spring of New England’s prosperity, was annihilated. Embargoes, restrictions, and rapacity of revenue officers, had completed its destruction.*”

January 8, 1815. Americans defeat a British army in the Battle of New Orleans in the last major land engagement of the war.

February 11, 1815. Under the white flag, HMS *Favorite* (18) delivers the peace treaty, Treaty of Ghent, to New York City.

February 16, 1815. President Madison signs Treaty of Ghent officially ending the War of 1812.

February 25, 1815. Treasury Secretary Alexander J. Dallas issues a circular to all customs collectors regarding future policy in light of the conclusion of the war. In the two-page circular, he instructs, “[cutter] *officers and men must be recommended for their vigilance, activity, skill and good conduct.*” Dallas later directs that “*Smuggling, in every form, must be prevented, or punished. And if it be not prevented, the officers of the customs, according to their respective duties and stations, will be held answerable to prove, that there was no want of vigilance on their part.*” In the final paragraph, Dallas lists other duties to be carried out by the customs officials, hence their respective cutters, including “*immediate measures will be taken, for restoring the light-houses, piers, buoys, and beacons, within your district and jurisdiction, to the state in which they were before the war.*”

March 3, 1815. Congress repeals “*the acts prohibiting the entrance of foreign vessels into the waters of the United States*”, thereby repealing elements of the Non-Intercourse and Non-Importation acts.

May 30, 1815. Treasury Secretary Alexander Dallas writes the New York customs collector about building one or more schooner-rigged cutters to replace those lost in the war.

Sources:

Cutter History File, Coast Guard Historian's Office.

Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships. Washington, DC: USGPO.

Donald Canney. *U.S. Coast Guard and Revenue Cutters, 1790-1935*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1995.

U.S. Coast Guard. *Record of Movements: Vessels of the United States Coast Guard: 1790 - December 31, 1933*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1934; 1989 (reprint).

